

STATEMENT ON WILLIAM LOCKRIDGE
DC STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION
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Presented by
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Good evening, Mr. Trabue and members of the State Board of Education. My name is Sally Schwartz. I am Founder and Executive Director of the DC Center for Global Education and Leadership (or CGEL), a local nonprofit organization which works to promote and support high quality, systemic, and equitable global education in our DC public schools.

I want to begin my remarks by sincerely thanking you for scheduling this public meeting to allow members of the community, such as myself, to share our thoughts about Mr. Lockridge on the occasion of his untimely passing. We don't do this enough in DC. I think it's especially important, at this moment in our city's history, to come together to hear testimony about someone like William Lockridge, who spent so many years working for quality education, particularly on behalf of those most disadvantaged and most powerless. There has been so much talk in the air in recent years about people who "care" about children and those who "don't care" about children - and a distorted and frankly disturbing narrative has developed around public education in this city. So I think it's very important both for those of us who have lived our whole lives here and for those who are new to DC, including and especially our new State Superintendent and Deputy Mayor for Education, to understand that there are people like Mr. Lockridge who have been in the trenches here for years, caring about and working on behalf the city's children.

I came to know Mr. Lockridge when I was working in DC Public Schools as the head of a one-person office - the Office of International Programs. It was my role to promote and support learning about the world, including learning world languages, in our K-12 schools. It was always interesting to me that of the elected officials I worked with the person who was most consistently supportive was William Lockridge. Interesting because I sometimes encountered the attitude (spoken or unspoken) that international education or language learning was really only for certain students. Some felt that as long as we had students who couldn't read or a host of other challenges in our schools, why would we be talking about students traveling abroad or learning another language, like Chinese? But William understood that broadening horizons and giving students access to challenging opportunities were essential to inspiring success. He was so proud when his own son, Stefan, was selected to appear on a panel with Dorothy Height at the UN World Conference Against Racism in Durban, South Africa in 2001. But he was almost as proud when students from Ballou or Anacostia, or frankly anywhere else in the city, had the opportunity to travel through a DCPS program to Africa, Europe, Asia, or Latin America.

Most of our conversations focused on access to language learning in DC. He always understood the importance of languages not only as a way to expose students to the wider world, but as an important element of a 21st century education. He understood the advantages that language proficiency gave a young person in applying to college or seeking employment. He was very supportive of our work, under former Superintendent Clifford Janey, to bring Chinese to DCPS. He participated in the signing ceremony that brought Chinese teachers to DCPS classrooms from China, and we traveled together to China to learn about the Chinese education system and to sign an MOA with the Beijing Municipal Education Commission. He spoke at our first Chinese language showcase. But of course, always embedded in that support was the understanding that students east of the river needed to be at the table – from the beginning. And so it was no coincidence that Aiton ES and Kelly Miller MS offered Chinese in the program's first year.

I've spoken before this Board about the inequities in access to foreign languages in DC public schools. Of course, as with any other inequity, this bothered William tremendously. Mr. Lockridge and I talked about creating a Language Institute east of the river, where students could take languages for credit not available at their own schools.

So in terms of my own work, I will really feel his absence. But there's another, larger way his absence will be felt. As a Board member, in the old School Board days, Mr. Lockridge was a consistent, unrelenting voice on behalf of what he believed and most especially on behalf of his constituents. He was notorious. He could be charming, or he could be in your face. But he was consistent, and it was his presence and his voice on that Board that made a real difference.

I was witness to many conversations in the bowels of DC Public Schools regarding planning for some program or other – and someone would invariably invoke William Lockridge's name. That was code, meaning there'd better be something for east of the river or Mr. Lockridge would certainly notice and make an issue of it. Sometimes it wasn't a pretty way to operate, but necessary. I always thought of him as the conscience of the Board and the school system.

Of course, William Lockridge was able to exert this influence because he was a member of an elected School Board that no longer exists. So I would turn back to you, as the successor elected Board and our only elected education representatives, not to underestimate the critical role you can play on behalf of your constituents. Though the role of the State Board differs, you have the power to be creative, to be outspoken, to be persistent, and to be impolite, if necessary, in pressing for quality education and advocating for the voiceless as education reform proceeds under our new mayor. I think that will be the best way to remember and honor the legacy of William Lockridge.

Thank you.